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May 12, 2003

Office of the Secretary of the FCC
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Subject: "EX PARTE COMMENT FOR DOCKET NUMBER 90-571 on NECA FUNDS" and "EX PARTE COMMENT TO DOCKET NUMBER 98-67 ON TRS/STS OUTREACH"

Dear Secretary:

PROVIDING SPEECH TO SPEECH

I live in Maine and am pleased that AT&T and the Maine Public Utility Commission have made telephones accessible to people with speech disabilities by establishing Speech to Speech. I strongly urge the Maine Public Utility Commission to establish an effective STS outreach service so that STS will be well utilized.

I also encourage AT&T to improve its STS services. Many AT&T Communications Assistants (CAs) have southern accents which are difficult to for people outside the South to understand. CAs should speak with accents appropriate to the area of the country which they serve. In addition, many AT&T CAs appear reluctant to revoice what consumers say. CAs need to be more willing to revoice.

BENEFITS

In California, people with speech disabilities have dramatically improved their lives because of STS. One example is Dr. Robert Aber who experienced great growth in his psychology practice once he was able to communicate with clients over STS. Writer Pam Hoyer advanced her writing career substantially using STS to gather facts for articles. Dr. Bob Segalman became successful as a social activist helping people with speech disabilities once he began using STS. STS potentially answers the telecommunications needs of thousands of people.

PROVIDING STS OUTREACH

Providing outreach appropriate to a particular user population is a prerequisite to access. When people with speech disabilities have appropriate training to use STS, they become more independent, participate more in the community, get jobs etc. The new relay regulations require states to contract with relay providers so that STS is accessible to users with speech disabilities. Providing outreach appropriate to a particular user population is a prerequisite to access.

If AT&T provides STS without appropriate outreach, call volumes will be extremely low. Call volumes could rise substantially with an extensive STS outreach service tailored to people with speech disabilities. Failure to provide appropriate outreach for STS likely means Maine residents with speech disabilities will not enter the mainstream of life.

Because I want this independence for people with speech disabilities in Maine, I strongly urge you to provide an STS outreach service similar to the very successful STS intensive outreach services in Minnesota, and to a lesser extent in California and Maryland.

FUNDING STS OUTREACH

Such a service may cost only \$50,000 because of Maine's low population. Many states have sufficient surcharge money to fund a \$50,000 STS outreach service without difficulty. It may be possible to use vocational

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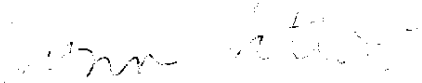
rehabilitation client services money to teach people to use STS as it fosters independence and makes people job ready.

CONCLUSION

A large proportion of people with speech disabilities have other disabilities as well; this makes it very difficult for them to advocate for themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for the rest of us to insure that services like STS outreach are adequately provided for.

Again, I strongly urge AT&T to increase its quality of service and I urge Maine Public Utility Commission to budget for an effective STS outreach service with a budget of \$50,000.

Sincerely,



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